

# How Love Is Supposed To Work

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One shot of what might have happened if Sakura had been less obsessed and less blind

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It was odd how sometimes small moments revealed great truths.

They were in the Land of Lilies on a regular old C rank mission when they came across the hideout of some local bandits. The bandits had planted a few traps using explosive notes and she and Naruto had accidentally tripped one.

There'd been an explosion and the two of them had been sent flying to land about twenty feet apart. Luckily ninja weren't that easy to kill and neither of them had been really hurt. It was what happened next that had come as a revelation.

As Sakura got back to her hands and knees she saw Sasuke rush to Naruto's side to see if he was all right. He just spent a few seconds with him and then hurried to her side to ask if she was hurt. She managed to shake her head and mumble, 'I'm fine.'

Sasuke gave a quick nod and went to help Kakashi beat down the bandits who were still trying to fight. As Sakura rose to her feet half dazed something was suddenly clear as day to her; something she should have noticed a long time ago.

Sasuke cared more about Naruto than he did for her.

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The bandits all wound up captured and handed over to the local authorities. The mission successfully completed they were on their way back to Konoha.

Without even thinking about it they fell into their usual formation. Naruto and Sasuke were out in front leading the way while she hung back with Kakashi trailing behind. As always it was Naruto who was at Sasuke's side.

Sakura's thoughts went back to the Chunin Exams and the attack on the village. She remembered facing three enemy ninja in the Forest of Death to protect a helpless Naruto and Sasuke. Facing Ino and fighting her rival to a draw. Standing alone before a murderous Gaara.

She could remember thinking that she had finally grown up. That at last she was a real shinobi and could walk at Sasuke's side.

Yet somehow, once they started going on missions again things had gone back to the old familiar pattern. She would spend all her time admiring Sasuke and trying to be the girl she thought he wanted her to be. Naruto was nothing but the annoying obstacle that kept coming between her and the one she loved. Despite all the missions and dangers they had been through together Sakura found herself no closer to him. Sasuke would acknowledge her as a teammate but nothing more. She was always kept at a distance and never allowed any nearer.

Naruto was the one who had gotten closer to him.

Whenever Naruto trained Sasuke would usually be somewhere close by. Sasuke would often provide some criticism or condescending remark that would send Naruto into a fury; but Naruto would always heed them and some error would be remedied.

When she trained Sasuke would pay her even less attention than Kakashi-sensei would.

Up ahead Naruto was pointing to something in the nearby woods.

Sasuke made some reply she couldn't make out.

Before long they were arguing the way they always did. Naruto gesturing wildly and shouting while Sasuke answered quietly refusing to show much emotion. Even though Sasuke lacked any hysterics he always responded. The two of them just knew how to

get under each other's' skins. They bickered like an old married couple some times.

When she tried to talk to him she was often just ignored. Sasuke occasionally dismissed her with a few words. He obviously didn't think she was worth the effort to actually talk to.

She heard Naruto yell 'bastard!' at the top of his lungs. She couldn't hear Sasuke's reply, but whatever it was it had Naruto spitting like an angry cat.

"Sensei, if I ask you something will you promise not to make fun of me?" She asked quietly.

"If this is about your performance during the mission there's nothing to be upset about Sakura." Kakashi said without ever looking up from his little orange book. It always amazed her how he could walk miles and miles and never trip or fall given his one eyes was always glued to his book.

Sakura blushed slightly at the subtle reminder that among everyone on the team she had done the least. "That's not what I wanted to talk about, and maybe if you actually took the time to train me I might do better."

"Right, I haven't heard that before."

She sighed trying to fight down her irritation. Kakashi-sensei was an awesome ninja when there was actual danger. The rest of the time he left a lot to be desired as a teacher. "I'm serious sensei. Can I actually talk to you like a normal student to a teacher?"

"Sure you can Sakura. What is it?" His attention never left his book.

"What... what do you think about love between teammates?"

"I've told you before Sakura, all my advice about how to get Sasuke's attention will have to wait until your body is more developed."

Her cheeks turned crimson. "That's not what I mean!"

He finally lifted his eye over the edge of his book and actually looked at her. "Do I need to get the anatomically correct sock puppets again?"

"No," she said quickly. She still had nightmares some times. "I am asking you about *feelings* between teammates."

Kakashi glanced to out in front to where Sasuke was. He knew what this was about. It was yet another attempt by Sakura to find some chink in Sasuke's armor. Kakashi decided to try and give her what advice he could that would be age appropriate. The problem was that his pink haired student didn't want advice, not really. She just wanted encouragement in her never ending campaign to win Sasuke's heart.

"Sakura, it's only natural for teammates to develop feelings for each other. You spend countless hours together training and working, you travel and share all sorts of new experiences, you go into battle and fight for each other, it's only to be expected that you would develop strong bonds and intense feelings. In many ways you will be closer to and know more about your teammates than you will about your own family."

Kakashi saw her eyes flash up front.

"I know all that," Sakura said nervously. "It's just, well, I always expected things to develop *naturally* do you know what I mean Kakashi-sensei?"

He nodded, she was young yet and despite being a ninja for half a year still had a lot of foolish notions.

"You think that you and Sasuke should feel a mutual attraction. That all the shared experiences and dangers should make the two of you slowly draw closer. Bit by bit your hearts draw you together until at

last the magical moment comes where you both realize you feel the same way and are in love. Is that about right?"

Sakura was nodding eagerly. "That's right sensei. Isn't that how love is supposed to work?"

"In romance novels or in the drama? Sure. In reality love is rarely ever that cut and dry."

"What do you mean?"

"What I mean Sakura is that in real life love is rarely as neat and tidy as in all the stories. It's rare to have the feeling be equal on both sides or to begin at the same time. A lot of times there will be complications, lingering feelings for past loves, feelings of jealousy or insecurity, misunderstandings, rivals for your affection..."

"Rivals," Sakura said uneasily.

Kakashi wondered if she was worried about Ino or some other girl. Was that the reason Sakura had wanted to bring up this subject? "The point is," Kakashi said gently. "That even in everyday life relationships and emotions between people can be very complicated. Being ninja and facing all the additional dangers and stresses we do only makes things even harder. You shouldn't expect things to work out the way you want them too even if you desperately want it to. The fact is you can never control what the other person's heart wants."

"But what if you really truly love someone and would do anything for them?"

"You mean like Naruto would for you?" Kakashi asked much too innocently.

Sakura made a face. "That's different."

"It usually is."

Sakura glared unhappily up at her sensei.

Kakashi shook his head. She didn't want to listen. "Sakura the simple fact is that no matter how strong your own feelings may be there is nothing you can do to make the object of your affections feel the same. You may have to accept the fact that no matter what you do he just may not feel the same."

"But... but... that's not fair!" Kunoichi or not she sounded like an upset child.

"I'm sorry Sakura. Which instructor at the Academy taught you life was fair?" Kakashi turned his attention back to his book.

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When they got back to the village it was late afternoon and the sun was approaching the horizon. Kakashi gave them the following day off as he usually did when they returned from a mission. He left the three of them to report into the tower and write up the mission report.

Since having her short talk with Kakashi Sakura had decided that her concerns were all the result of an overactive imagination. She pushed down her insecurities and tried to latch onto her old self confidence. She was a beautiful, smart, strong kunoichi who knew Sasuke-kun better than anyone. No one else could possibly be a better match for Sasuke and sooner or later he would definitely realize it.

The idea he would fall for anyone else, especially *Naruto*, was just ridiculous. She bounded up to him determined to ask him out on another date. Even if he rejected her, as she expected him to, it was still a way to show him how much she cared about him.

"So dobe," Sasuke spoke. "How about I treat you to some ramen?"

Sakura froze in her tracks.

Naruto looked both excited and suspicious. "You want to buy me a free meal? How come?"

Sasuke shrugged indifferently. "Think of it as a reward for being less annoying than usual this time out. If you don't want it just say so it doesn't matter to me."

An ear to ear grin split his face. "Free ramen! That's what I'm talking about! Maybe you're not such an annoying bastard after all!" Naruto put his arm around Sasuke's shoulders and began dragging him off in the general direction of Ichiraku's.

"Don't touch me." Sasuke grumbled but did not push him away.

Sakura just stood there rooted to the spot forgotten.

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When Sasuke went back home that evening he was surprised to find Sakura pacing outside waiting for him.

"Sakura, what are you doing here?"

Sakura glared at him with righteous fury. "How could you go on a date with Naruto?"

Both Sasuke's eyebrows jumped up at the startling accusation. "Date? What are you talking about? I just got done eating some ramen with my teammate."

Sakura pressed on as though not hearing him. "How many times have I offered to go out with you and you turned me down every time! How could ask Naruto to eat with you instead of me?"

"It's *because* he doesn't constantly pester me that I was okay with eating with him. Besides he told me he didn't have any money until we get our mission checks. I figured I could treat him."

"That's only part of it Sasuke!" Her fears and tensions had been building up and now they erupted. "How can you be in love with Naruto instead of me?"

"Love?" Sasuke choked out.

"I mean I know homosexuality isn't against the law here and you hear stories every once and awhile, but you can't Sasuke you just can't!"

"Sakura..."

"How are you going to restore your clan if you marry Naruto? I mean I know he can use henges but it's just not the same! He won't be able to have your babies. I'm a pretty girl and I have wide hips and I only started my cycle a few months ago. I can give you as many babies as you want. It's just too unfair Sasuke!"

Sasuke was staring at her as she kept rambling on.

"How can you be in love with Naruto instead of me? I'm smarter than he is, more popular, prettier, and I'm a **girl** you know it's much more socially acceptable to have a spouse of the opposite sex right? I mean imagine meeting a foreign dignitary and having to introduce Naruto as your wife! Can you imagine the problems there?"

"You've gone insane haven't you?"

"But the worst part of it, the absolute worst, is that I LOVE YOU! I've loved you for years! I would do anything for you! I know I am the one who could make you happy if you would just give me a chance! I know you better than anyone and would love you better than anyone!"

"Who is the person I want to kill and why?" Sasuke asked in a quiet voice.

Sakura opened her mouth to say more and stopped. His question struck home and she suddenly found herself with no ready answer.

"Guess you don't know me as well as you think." He told her coldly.

His reaction and the hard look in his eyes made all her anger just vanish. She abruptly realized she was standing out in the middle of an empty street screaming at Sasuke and making all sorts of accusations at him. It occurred to her that this might not be such a good idea.

"So you through?" Sasuke asked frostily.

"Yeah." She said in a small voice.

"Then how about I reply so we don't have to wonder about this later."

"That's really not..."

"First off I'm not gay Sakura. Unlike you I'm not obsessed about all that. I don't want to date, never mind marry, anyone right now that includes you, the dobe, Ino, and everyone else. Naruto is my teammate and sometimes I can tolerate him. Even though he annoys me sometimes at least he has the right priorities. He wants to get stronger. His dream is stupid, but at least it's one I can respect. He doesn't pester me all the time and expect me to stop everything just to spend time with him."

"Sasuke I..."

"I don't like you Sakura." He said in a voice as cold as ice. "Not in the way you want. In all the time we've known each other I have never once given you any reason to think that I did. Honestly do I have to stab you for you to take the hint? If I had any interest at all in you as anything more than a teammate I would have given you some sign by now. For the love of kami Sakura I don't want to date you! Will you stop chasing after something that is never going to happen?"

"But I really love you," she said on the verge of tears. "I would do anything for you."

Sasuke shrugged. "That's how Naruto feels about you."

"That is different! Don't compare my feelings to Naruto's! It's totally different."

"Only because where Naruto is involved you're on the receiving end of all the unwanted affection. Where with me you are the cause of it. You should be glad I don't answer all your date requests with a punch and me screaming 'baka' at the top of my lungs."

"Sasuke you're breaking my heart." She said miserably.

"I'm sorry Sakura, I don't want to hurt you, but maybe this is the only way to make you understand. It's not like you ever took the hint of me saying no all those times. You don't know me as well as you think, no one does. You're in love with this image you have that's got nothing to do with the real me. And even if you really do love me then I truly am sorry because I just don't feel the same, and am never going to."

With that he walked past her.

"Good night Sakura."

She heard him climb his steps and his door open and close behind her. She stood there alone in the street and cried thinking that maybe this was what it really meant to grow up.